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RUEAIIA/CIA WASHDC  
RUEPADJ/CJTF-HOA J2X CAMP LEMONIER DJ  
RUEKDIA/DIA WASHDC  
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LONDON AND PARIS FOR AFRICA WATCHERS  
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SUBJECT: Egypt Contemplates Deporting 400 Eritreans

¶1. (SBU) Ambassador met March 24 with Egyptian Ambassador Ihab Hamouda to discuss the presence of illegal Eritrean immigrants in Egypt, of which Ihab claims there are more than 400. Ihab said the government of Egypt and the Eritrean Ministry of Foreign Affairs are discussing a procedure for returning these immigrants-cum-refugees.

¶2. (SBU) Ambassador Ihab described two ways that Eritreans travel to Egypt. The first has been by obtaining Egyptian visas through misrepresentation by the Eritrean MFA. Ihab stated that Eritrean MFA employees routinely call the Egyptian Consulate on behalf of private citizens (presumed to be the result of bribes). The Egyptian Embassy has learned that many of these visa recipients have attempted to cross the Israeli border through Egypt. The second method involves traveling via Sudan up the Red Sea Coast towards Egypt. Ihab noted that these immigrants do not have Egyptian visas and generally tend to stay a week on the Eastern coast, before continuing north to the Sinai and eventually crossing into Israel. Ihab commented that Egypt has 750 police along the Sinai border, a grossly inadequate number needed to address this illegal migration. Several Eritreans have been killed trying to cross from Egypt into Israel in the past month, according to press reports.

¶3. (SBU) COMMENT: Despite the known dangers of crossing the very sensitive Egypt-Israel border, many Eritreans attempt the journey, another indication of the desperation of the populace in the face of Eritrean living conditions. Concerns about swelling numbers of Eritrean refugees and immigrants have been voiced to us by officials from the U.K., Sweden, Switzerland, Sudan, Libya, and Italy, in addition to the Egyptian Ambassador. End Comment.

MCMULLEN